

Hunt (Jos. H.)

JOHN BAPTIST MORGAGNI, M.D., F.R.S., ETC., ETC.,

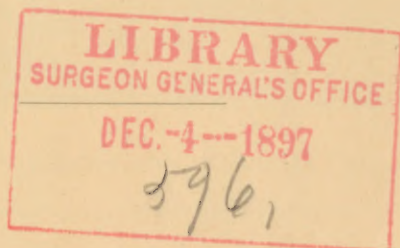
THE FATHER OF PATHOLOGICAL ANATOMY.

BY

JOSEPH H. HUNT, M.D.,

CHAIRMAN OF HISTORICAL COMMITTEE, MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE COUNTY
OF KINGS.

presented by the author

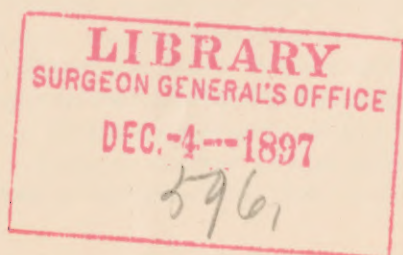


Reprinted from
THE BROOKLYN MEDICAL JOURNAL,
November, 1896.



JOHN BAPTIST MORGAGNI, M.D., F.R.S., ETC.

(THE FATHER OF PATHOLOGICAL ANATOMY).



JOHN BAPTIST MORGAGNI, M. D., F. R. S., ETC.

“Vir ingenii, memoriæ, studii incomparabilis.”—*Haller*.

“The founder of Pathological Anatomy,” whose portrait, taken from an extremely rare portrait by Renard, is to be found in this number of the JOURNAL, was born at Forli, an Italian town near Bologna, in 1682.

We are told that he was a precocious student, and at school he was conspicuous for his readiness and his acquisitions in study. At the age of sixteen he entered the University of Bologna, where he took his medical degree three years later, in 1701.

He at once began to act as prosector for the celebrated Valsalva, his teacher of anatomy, and assisted him in preparing his classical work on the Anatomy and Diseases of the Ear, which was published in 1704. Morgagni is said to have made the greater number of preparations described in the work. Many years after (1740) Morgagni edited a collected edition of his teacher's works with important additions to the treatise on the ear, and a memoir of Valsalva. He also supplied the place of Valsalva as teacher of anatomy at a time when the latter was on a visit to Parma, and became exceedingly popular as a lecturer, being “eloquent in discourse, and illustrating his subjects by a great variety of preparations.”

While a resident of Bologna he was made President of the Academy, though at the time but twenty-four years old, and is said to have marked his incumbency of the presidential chair by discouraging abstract speculations, and insisting upon exact anatomical facts and reasoning based thereon.

His own communications to the academy were some of them published as the first of his “*Adversaria Anatomica*,” which was followed by five more published at different times and places. The first, as stated, at Bologna, and the remainder at Padua, to which place he had transferred the scene of his studies and teachings. They were collected and published at Padua in 1719, and afterwards at Leyden in 1723, a copy of which edition is one of the writer's treasures. There is another Leyden edition of 1740, and one was published in Venice in 1762. This work, with

his Anatomical Epistles published in 1728, contains a series of observations published to rectify the mistakes of previous anatomists, and to determine the characters of the healthy structure of many parts of the human body. Many parts he describes anew, and indicates facts not previously observed. A distinguished writer has said: "All his remarks show how well he knew what true anatomical description ought to be."

The same writer groups Morgagni with his two friends, Santorini and Valsalva, forming a triumvirate who "may be said to have anticipated their contemporaries nearly a century; for while other authors were satisfied with giving loose and inaccurate or meager notices of parts, with much fanciful supposition, Valsalva, Santorini, and Morgagni labored to determine with precision the anatomical characters of the parts which they describe."

After spending some time in the celebrated Universities of Padua and Venice, Morgagni settled down to the practice of his profession in his native town of Forli, where he rapidly achieved a reputation only limited by the environments of the small town in which he lived. For three years he worked as a practicing and consulting physician, "attentive in observation, cautious in prediction, and happy in his cures." Tiring of the drudgery of general practice, and wishing to enlarge his sphere, he removed to Padua, and succeeded Vallisnieri in the chair of theoretical medicine in the University, where he taught with the most brilliant success for sixty years. Most of the time, however, in the chair of anatomy, which he assumed in 1715, where he was the successor of a brilliant line of scholars, including Vesalius, Fallopius, Fabricius, Gasserius, and Spigelius. What wonder that the University of Padua attracted the aspiring medical minds of the world!

It is said that such was his fame that the Senate from time to time increased his stipend, until it reached the sum of 1200 gold ducats annually, much more than was given to any of his contemporaries. A writer says that he lived in harmony with his colleagues who did not envy him his unprecedentedly large salary; his residence and lecture-room were frequented by students of all ages, attracted from all parts of Europe. No person of any learning came to Padua without seeing and conversing with Morgagni, and no one ever left him without admiring equally his character and his teaching. Among his personal friends were Charles Emmanuel III., King of Sardinia; the Popes Clement

XI., XII., and XIII., and Benedict XIV. In his own profession were such men as Valsalva, Lancisi (whom he assisted in producing the anatomy of Eustachius), Verheyen, Heister, Ruysch, Boerhaave, Richard Mead, and numerous others of scarcely less renown. The fact that he was the teacher of Scarpa (who died in 1832) connects him with modern medicine.

He lived to a good old age, nearly ninety, and did not cease work even after he had become blind, and it was not until he had reached full maturity, beyond the age of but few, that he wrote the great monumental work which marked an epoch in our profession, "made pathological anatomy a science, and diverted the cause of medicine into new channels of exactness or precision." It bears the title, "*De Sedibus et Causis Morborum per Anatomicum Indigatis Libri Quinque*," and was published in Venice in 1761, when the venerable author was seventy-nine years old. It consists of five books, the first dedicated to Trew, the second to Bromfield, the third to Senac, the fourth to Schreiber, the fifth to Meckel, and contains seventy letters. The men to whom these dedications were made were regarded by the author as the representatives of five of the many learned societies of which Morgagni was a foreign member.

The following is given in the words of the author, taken from the preface, as translated by Benjamin Alexander in 1779: "The anatomical writings of Valsalva being already published, and my epistles upon them, it accidentally happen'd that, being retir'd from Padua, as in those early years I was wont frequently to do in the summer-time, I fell into company with a young gentleman of strict morals and an excellent disposition, who was much given to the study of the sciences, and particularly to that of medicine. This young gentleman, having read those writings, and those letters likewise, every-now-and-then engaged me in a discourse, than which nothing could be more agreeable to me; I mean, a discourse in respect to my preceptors, and in particular Valsalva and Albertina, whose methods in the art of healing, even the most trifling, he was desirous to know; and he even sometimes inquired after my own observations and thoughts as well as theirs.

"And having among other things, as frequently happens in conversations, open'd my thoughts in regard to the Sepulchretum, he never ceas'd to entreat me by every kind of solicitation, that I would apply to this subject in particular; and, as I had promised in my little memoir upon the life of Valsalva, to endeavor

that a great number of his observations, which were made with the same view, should be brought to public light, he begged that I would join mine together with them, and would shew in both his and mine, by example as it were, what I should think wanting to compleat a new edition of the *Sepulchretum*.

"I therefore produce observations which have never been published before, a great number of which are Valsalva's, not a few of my friends, but the greater part mine. * * *

"For, finally, in respect to my own observations, I have particularly related in each the year, month, and place in which they were made, and who assisted me, or were present at the time, unless I had sufficiently done it before," etc., etc.

Thus the example was established for all future records of observations of medical cases, and one who studies this work will find that the standard then set was sufficiently elevated to suit the most exacting of to-day. "The principal objections to the work are the periphrastic style, the profuseness of which almost suffocates the sense, an unsupportable minuteness in detail of collateral and unimportant circumstances; a tedious repetition of observations; and an artificial division of diseases into those of the head, of the thorax, of the belly, and into the chirurgical and universal disorders." (Horner).

Such was the renown of the book that during the few years that remained of the author's life, and notwithstanding the immensity of the work, three editions in the original Latin were brought out within four years, and it was translated and published in French (1765), German (1771), and an English edition in three quarto-volumes in 1769, a copy of which is in the writer's library.

It is justly styled "One of the most precious monuments of our art," and the student of Morgagni will appreciate the words of the genial Holmes, that "The old is not all ancient, nor is the modern always new."

Morgagni is described as a man of fine stature, robust constitution, and possessed an agreeable and lively countenance.

He died December 5, 1771, having then nearly completed his ninetieth year, in the possession of his mental faculties, though he was the father of fifteen children.

"Of no distemper, of no blast he died,
But fell like autumn-fruit that mellowed long,
Ev'n wondered at, because he dropp'd no sooner.
Fate seemed to wind him up for four-score years,
Yet freely he ran on ten winters more;
'Til, like a clock worn out with eating time,
The wheels of weary life stood still." —Dryden's *Ædipus*.

Besides the portrait published, which is from Pettigrew's Medical Portrait Gallery, the writer possesses a folio portrait engraved by Jean Renard in 1762, nine years before Morgagni's death, and the portrait prefaced to the *Adversaria Anatomicæ* (previously noted), representing the author in 1718, engraved by J. N. French.

He also has an autograph note of Morgagni's, written at Padua, December, MDCCCLX; and the Morgagni bronze medal issued in Rome, 1808, a picture of which was presented in the *JOURNAL* of January, 1896.

His was the expression that "Ideas should be weighed, not measured." Numerous editions of his various works have been published. The titles form a list occupying nearly three columns of the Index-Catalogue in the Surgeon-General's office.

J. H. H.

